

The Glorious Revolution

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Glorious Revolution, also called Revolution of 1688, or Bloodless Revolution , in English history, the events of 1688–89 that resulted in the deposition of James II and the accession of his daughter Mary II and her husband, William III, prince of Orange and stadholder of the Netherlands.

After the accession of James II in 1685, his overt Roman Catholicism alienated the majority of the population. In 1687 he issued a Declaration of Indulgence, suspending the penal laws against dissenters and recusants, and in April 1688 ordered that a second Declaration of Indulgence be read from every pulpit on two successive Sundays. William Sancroft, the archbishop of Canterbury, and six other bishops petitioned him against this and were prosecuted for seditious libel. Their acquittal almost coincided with the birth of a son to James's Roman Catholic queen, Mary of Modena (June). This event promised an indefinite continuance of his policy and brought discontent to a head. Seven eminent Englishmen, including one bishop and six prominent politicians of both Whig and Tory persuasions, wrote inviting William of Orange to come over with an army to redress the nation's grievances.

William was both James's nephew and his son-in-law, and, until the birth of James's son, his wife, Mary, was heir apparent. William's chief concern was to check the overgrowth of French power in Europe, and he welcomed England's aid. Thus, having been in close touch with the leading English malcontents for more than a year, he accepted their invitation. Landing at Brixham on Tor Bay (November 5), he advanced slowly on London, as support fell away from James II. James's daughter Anne and his best general, John Churchill, were among the deserters to William's camp; thereupon James fled to France.

William was now asked to carry on the government and summon a Parliament. When this Convention Parliament met (January 22, 1689), it agreed, after some debate, to treat James's flight as an abdication and to offer the Crown, with an accompanying Declaration of Right, to William and Mary jointly. Both gift and conditions were accepted. Thereupon the convention turned itself into a proper Parliament and large parts of the Declaration into a Bill of Rights. This bill gave the succession to Mary's sister, Anne, in default of issue to Mary; barred Roman Catholics from the throne; abolished the Crown's power to suspend laws; condemned the power of dispensing with laws "as it hath been exercised and used of late"; and declared a standing army illegal in time of peace.

The settlement marked a considerable triumph for Whig views. If no Roman Catholic could be king, then no kingship could be unconditional. The adoption of the exclusionist solution lent support to John Locke's contention that government was in the nature of a social contract between the king and his people represented in parliament. The revolution permanently established Parliament as the ruling power of England.